

# Wildlife Habitat Management

## Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry

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Forest management can be tailored to benefit any species or groups of species. Timber harvest can serve as a valuable wildlife management tool, especially when the following principles and techniques are taken into account.

In general, maintaining a *diverse habitat* with a mix of forest, small openings and “edges” between them will benefit deer, rabbit, turkey, raccoon, quail, grouse and many non-game animals.

**Create openings** in the forest to provide more sunlight, which in turn produces accessible foods. Openings can include **timber harvests**, seeded **log landings and roads**, long, narrow **game strips** in unbroken forest, and permanent wildlife **food plots** (at least ¼ acre in size).

**“Feather” forest edges** (thin the forest near openings to encourage a brushy edge).

**Leave buffers along streams:** minimum 50’ uncut buffers along each side of perennial streams, and twice that distance along trout streams and in areas managed for songbirds. **Swamps, bogs and other wetlands** demand special consideration.

**Leave 1 to 3 den trees** per acre and as many large **dead trees (snags)** as possible to benefit squirrels, raccoons and birds. Leave a few other trees in a clump around each den tree. **Snags** should be at least 12” diameter and 10’ tall. Create snags where few are present by girdling commercially undesirable trees.

**Build nest boxes** for squirrel, bats, and certain birds if den trees are lacking. Patterns for constructing nest boxes are available from Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, 1-800-624-7406.

**Thin crowded stands** to increase tree growth, health and mast (food) production.

Establish stands of **native warm season grasses** for big game and game birds.

**Use prescribed fire** to maintain food plots and native warm season grass plantings, and to improve habitat in pine stands (older than 10-15 years).

**Exclude livestock from the woods.** They compete with wildlife for browse, compact the soil, and damage young trees.

**Make piles of brush and limbs** after timber cutting to provide cover for rabbit, quail and songbirds.

**Plant evergreens** to provide hiding cover and winter shelter for many wildlife species.

Allow **brush and trees** to grow along fences, and provide **“headquarters areas”**- dense brush thickets - to provide cover for rabbit, quail, etc.

**Manage for oak** and other hard-mast-producers by cutting other competing species around them. Conduct periodic timber harvests to regenerate oaks that are past their mast-producing prime in order to assure a future acorn supply. Sawtooth (Chinese) oak, available from the State Seedling Nursery, and blight-resistant chestnut, which can be ordered from several commercial nurseries in Tennessee, are heavy and consistent mast producers.

**Plan ahead for the gypsy moth**, an invasive pest that can devastate oak forests on dry sites. Strive for a diverse, healthy forest. Yellow poplar and sugar maple are avoided by the gypsy moth.

**Protect endangered species on your land.** These usually occur in small, unusual habitats near water and on rock outcrops. Information can be obtained from handbooks available through the Forestry Division.